

Government wants stricter Energy Star rules

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WASHINGTON — The Energy Department is beefing up standards for washing machines sold with the Energy Star label, which identifies less-energy hungry appliances.

The department said Friday that the change is projected to save \$92.4 million on water and utility bills in the first year, based on a projection that 1.9 million washers will be sold under the new Energy Star requirements beginning July 1, 2009.

Major makers of washers include Whirlpool Corp., which makes the Whirlpool and Maytag brands, and General Electric Co.

To qualify for the label program, washers must be 43 percent more energy-efficient than current minimum standards. By 2011, they must be 59 percent more energy efficient. The 2011 requirements are projected to save consumers \$120 million per year in utility bills and 11.2 billion gallons of water.

The government also is allowing making more kinds of energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs — such as decorative bulbs for candelabras — eligible for the Energy Star label. The new standards also limit, for the first time, the amount of mercury that the bulbs can contain. If broken, the bulbs release a small level of mercury, an element considered toxic.

The energy bill signed by President Bush last year calls for incandescent bulbs — which were developed by Thomas Edison — to start being phased out in 2012. At that point, for example, manufacturers will have to replace 100-watt bulbs with those that provide the same amount of light for 72 watts, with additional improvements required by 2020.

The Energy Star program is run by the Energy Department and the Environmental Protection Agency.